

Hall's Corner History Tour

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"Hall's Corner has always fascinated me." Duxbury Town Historian Tony Kelso began his historical walking tour of Hall's Corner on Sunday with these words, and during his hour-long remembrance of the area he proved why the history of the area really is fascinating.

The tour was sponsored by the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society and was open to the public.

According to Kelso, Hall's Corner has been the center of Duxbury's commercial activity since 1638, soon after Duxbury's founding.



A vintage postcard shows Hall's Tavern and the flagpole: "Go slow – turn to right of flagstaff per order Selectmen."

The main streets of Standish and Chestnut that meet at the center of the Hall's Corner traffic circle were the

Photo by DHRS

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A Tour of Hall's Corner history

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original paths used by local natives and residents.

"Duxbury in the 17th century was a spider web of paths that the natives had made and the residents used," he said.

This web of paths took travelers to Sprague's "ordinary," an old-fashioned word for tavern that began in this area in 1603.

"Nobody ever really knows where the tavern was. It was somewhere between Harden Hill and Hornbeam Road," said Kelso.

It was supposed to be for travelers but the towns people enjoyed it too, almost too much, sometimes, Kelso said: "The Sprague tavern was notorious. It kept popping up in court records. It had a colorful reputation."

One of the fascinating things about Hall's Corner, said Kelso, is that many of the buildings there today started life in different locations. "The majority of the buildings seen in Hall's Corner today were built or moved by these Duxbury families – the Benottis, the Cushings, the Freemans, the Nathans and the Myricks," he said.

"The corner has always had dynamic businesses that responded to the needs of the local residents of that era," explained Kelso. "These dynamics have created buildings that have been repurposed over the years. This has meant a history of houses and buildings that were moved as needs changed."

Kelso explained why the large white house between the London Looks hair salon and Duxbury Wine and Spirits is set back from the road: In 1854, a man named Harvey Soule built a house at the corner of Washington and Standish streets and opened the first Hall's Corner store. In 1929, area businessman Jack Nathan bought Soule's house and moved it to its current location at 11 Washington Street. Nathan planned to build a series of one-story stores in front of that house but that never happened. Over the years, this house served as a post office and a dental office.

Most of the buildings in Hall's Corner have what Kelso calls "a great multi-layered history."

The 1929 brick building that now houses Duxbury Wine and Spirits used to be the home of Barnes Market, a place that not only delivered groceries but allowed customers to do self-service, "which was a big deal" back then, said Kelso.

Nathan's second building was right next door and now houses Cottons but for many decades it was home to a five and ten cent store with oiled wooden floors.

The current Reed's jewelers was Toabe's hardware store and the building that contains Duxbury Pizza was a First National supermarket then later an A & P grocery store. In 1948, Nine Standish Street held a Rexall pharmacy and soda fountain that was owned by the Munros, a couple who were both pharmacists, which was an unusual profession for a woman at that time, said Kelso.

Between 1845 to 1968, Hall's Corner had a school, a post office, and a fire house. Between 1870 to 1872, there was a tinsmith shop, a wheelwright shop and blacksmith's shop. In 1874, the second oneroom schoolhouse was built and still stands today as the Girl Scout house on Washington Street. In 1870, in response to the railroad coming through Duxbury, Levi Cushing opened a livery stable and stage business in what is now the parking area behind Duxbury Pizza. Between 1915 - 1921, the Cushings shifted their horse-based transportation business to automobiles and, with their cement block business, built a building for a car dealership of DeSotos and Dodges; the building is now Dunkin' Donuts. By 1937, the corner had four markets and there was a lumber yard where the Rockland Trust bank is today.

The growing population in Duxbury and the rise of the automobile and ensuing traffic necessitated a way to direct traffic in the area and the flag pole in the center of the corner was erected. Kelso said he could not find out exactly when the flagpole came to be but knows that it was sometime in the early part of the 20th century.

“The flagpole was put to channel automobile traffic and has become a beloved and cursed emblem of Hall’s Corner,” Kelso said.

Kelso’s tour wound around each block of Hall’s Corner and for each building there was at least one story and sometimes two or three. These were the places where generations of Duxbury residents created memories: first frappes at the soda fountain or at White’s dairy bar, first haircuts at the barbershop built in 1908 that now houses Scoops, stores emptying out when the Chestnut Street fire house’s alarm sounded and volunteers rushed to that building, kids playing pranks on postmaster Harvey Soule at his store in the 1890s by flinging around the circular mail sorter until all the mail flew to the ground.

The tour ended in the parking lot of the Gulf station because Kelso had saved the best story for last: the story of why Hall’s Corner got its name.

According to Kelso, Hall’s Corner was named for the Hall family. Captain Daniel Hall was a ship captain who owned land from the old burial ground on Chestnut Street to St. Margaret’s convent on Washington Street. He retired from the sea and built a large hip-roofed house in 1810 that he ran as a tavern from that time until 1847. The last Hall descendent died in the 1890s and the house stood in its original location until 1930 when a Harvard professor and his history-loving wife bought the house and took it down board by board to reassemble it in Cambridge, where it stands today “well preserved” on the street Gray Gardens West, said Kelso.

The current configuration seen today in the corner is a result of changes made in the 1960s when there was a shift from what Kelso calls the “tight-knit business” area to a more sprawling shopping complex on Depot Street, which was opened in 1968.

Kelso concluded his talk by repeating his underlying theme of why the history of this area is fascinating to him and others who study it: “That reoccurring story of buildings always changing and repurposing over the years is the story of Hall’s Corner.”

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Duxbury Town Historian Tony Kelso discusses the history of Hall's Corner on Sunday.

Photos by Mary Schiess



An audience of more than twenty residents gathered on Standish Street as part of a tour of Hall's Corner given by Town Historian Tony Kelso and sponsored by Duxbury Rural and Historical Society.